

Preparing for College

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Update: http://www.uh.edu/socialwork/New_research/cwep/prospective-students/

Preparing for college is a **four-year process** that typically begins when a student enters the 9th grade. Below you will find a step-by-step guide to applying to colleges in the State of Texas. Please check with your school counselor for details.

Freshman Year (Grade 9)

- Begin to explore careers and colleges. Start by visiting college websites and develop a relationship with your school counselor and teachers. Talk with people in your field of interest.
- When looking at prospective colleges, consider a variety of factors including the cost, location, types of programs, admissions criteria, student body composition, and support network.
- Talk with your school counselor and sign up for courses that will prepare you for college. Make sure you select a curriculum that will both challenge and interest you.
- Try to take honors or advanced classes in your interest areas.
- Get involved in community and school activities. Select activities that will eventually provide you with leadership experience.
- Talk with your parents about the cost of college and develop a financial plan.

Sophomore Year (Grade 10)

- Attend college fairs and consult with current students and alumni about their experiences.
- Take the PSAT for the first time in October.
- Continue to participate in a variety of extracurricular activities
- Make campus visits with your parents to get a feel for the school.
- Speak with your school counselor and develop an academic plan for your junior and senior years.
- Use your summer to prepare for the SAT or ACT.

Junior Year (Grade 11)

- Continue to visit prospective schools and attend information sessions.
- Develop a short list of your target colleges and research their specific admissions criteria. Try to have a good balance of dream schools, safety schools, and good matches in between.
- Look for opportunities to assume leadership positions in your extracurricular activities.
- Begin researching scholarships (and start applying)
- Brainstorm ideas for essay topics for your college applications.
- Start talking about your college interest with teachers whom you will invite to write your reference letters.
- Start writing essays and seek editorial and guidance support from teachers and other professionals in your field of interest.
- Take the SAT or ACT for the first time.
- When registering for SAT or ACT, make sure to put your target colleges as recipients of the Score Report Request (for the free score reports).
- Take any SAT Subject Tests required by your finalist schools.
- Use your summer to study for the ACT or SAT tests if you plan to re-take them.

Senior Year (Grade 12)

- Request reference letters at least 3 weeks in advance. Talk in person and then email your reference person with an attachment that includes your résumé and an example letter (including the college address and a paragraph for the reference person to write about you).
- If applying to schools through the ApplyTexas Application, be sure to research their requirements and deadlines.
- Take or retake the ACT, SAT, or SAT Subject Tests if required.
- Apply to several schools and send in your applications as early as possible. Make note of all application deadlines early!
- Send in any required forms if you're applying for financial aid (either the FAFSA or the TASFA). Submit them early for best consideration.
- After you've decided which college you'll be attending, notify the other colleges that you have been admitted to another college.
- Make sure to write thank you notes to those who helped you in this process!

Academic Achievement Tests for Higher Education

Undergraduate Admissions

SAT Reasoning Test (Scholastic Assessment Test)

Required by many four-year colleges, especially private schools. Usually taken once or twice starting in the Junior Spring. (www.collegeboard.com)

SAT Subject Tests

Required or recommended by some four-year colleges (the specific subjects vary). Usually taken once or twice, starting between the Junior and Senior year. (www.collegeboard.com)

ACT (American College Testing)

Accepted in place of the SAT by many four-year colleges, often preferred by state schools. Usually taken once or twice, starting in the Junior Spring. (www.actstudent.org)

AP Tests (Advanced Placement)

Accepted as college credit at most four-year colleges if a high school is achieved. Can sometimes be taken regardless of whether student has taken an AP class. Taken in the junior and senior years of high school. (www.apcentral.collegeboard.com)

Graduate/Professional Schools

GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test)

Test in mathematics usually required for graduate business studies. Usually taken in the junior or senior year of college. (www.mba.com)

GRE (Graduate Record Examination) (Scores: 130-170 Verbal or Quantitative)

Similar to the SAT, the GRE is required for many graduate programs, particularly those in the social sciences. Usually taken in the junior or senior year of college. (www.ets.org/gre)

LSAT (Law School Admission Test)

Required for entrance into law school. Usually taken in the junior or senior year of college. (www.lsac.org)

MCAT (Medical College Admission Test)

Required for entrance into medical school. Usually taken in the junior or senior year of college. (www.aamc.com/mcat)

PCAT (Pharmacy College Admission Test)

Required for entrance into pharmacy school. Usually taken in the junior or senior year of college. (www.pcatweb.info)

Language Proficiency Tests

IELTS (International English Language Testing System)

Accepted by over 2,000 academic institutions in the US (www.ielts.org)

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language)

Usually a college admission requirement for non-native English speakers. Taken the senior year of high school. (www.ets.org/toefl)

The SAT Test

The digital SAT is composed of two sections: Reading and Writing and Math. Students have 64 minutes to complete the Reading and Writing section and 70 minutes to complete the Math section for a total of 2 hours and 14 minutes.

Each section is divided into 2 equal length modules, and there is a 10-minute break between the Reading and Writing section and the Math section. The first module of each section contains a broad mix of easy, medium, and hard questions. Based on how students perform on the first module, the second module of questions will either be more difficult or less difficult.

Compared to the ACT®, the SAT provides 68% more time per question:

Component	Time Allotted (minutes)	Number of Questions/Tasks
Reading and Writing	64 (two 32-minute modules)	54
Math	70 (two 35-minute modules)	44
Total	134	98

Most of the questions are multiple choice, though some of the math questions ask you to enter the answer rather than select it.

On all questions, there's no penalty for guessing: if you're not sure of the answer, it's better to guess than leave the response blank.

The Reading and Writing Section: Overview

The Reading and Writing section presents short reading passages (or passage pairs) followed by a single multiple-choice question. Questions on the Reading and Writing section represent one of four content domains—Craft and Structure, Information and Ideas, Standard English Conventions, and Expression of Ideas. To help you budget your time, questions that test similar skills and knowledge are grouped together and arranged from easiest to hardest.

The test is divided into 2 modules, each of which includes questions from all four different domains.

What the Reading and Writing Passages Are Like:

The passages in the Reading and Writing section range from 25 to 150 words. Passages represent the subject areas of literature, history/social studies, the humanities, and science.

What the Reading and Writing Questions Are Like:

The questions on the Reading and Writing section fall into four content domains:

Information and Ideas

Measures comprehension, analysis, and reasoning skills and knowledge and the ability to locate, interpret, evaluate, and integrate information and ideas from texts and informational graphics (tables, bar graphs, and line graphs).

Craft and Structure

For more information about the Child Welfare Education Project, please email Dr. Monit Cheung at mcheung@uh.edu.

Measures the comprehension, vocabulary, analysis, synthesis, and reasoning skills and knowledge needed to understand and use high-utility words and phrases in context, evaluate texts rhetorically, and make connections between topically related texts.

Expression of Ideas

Measures the ability to revise texts to improve the effectiveness of written expression and to meet specific rhetorical goals.

Standard English Conventions

Measures the ability to edit text to conform to core conventions of Standard English sentence structure, usage, and punctuation.

The Math Section: Overview

The Math section focuses on the areas of math that play the biggest role in college and career success:

Algebra

Advanced Math

Problem-Solving and Data Analysis

Geometry and Trigonometry

Like the Reading and Writing section, the Math section is divided into 2 modules. Over the course of the Math section, you'll answer multiple-choice and student-produced response questions that measure your fluency with, understanding of, and ability to apply the math concepts, skills, and practices that are most essential.

Approximately 30% of Math questions are set in context. These in-context ("word") questions require you to consider a science, social studies, or real-world scenario and apply your math skills and knowledge, along with an understanding of the context, to determine the answer to each.

Types of Math Tested

The math questions are divided into four categories. Questions from all four categories appear in each test module. Across each module, questions are arranged from easiest to hardest, allowing you to have the best opportunity to demonstrate what you know and can do.

Type of Math	Number of Questions
Algebra	13–15
Advanced Math	13–15
Problem-Solving and Data Analysis	5–7
Geometry and Trigonometry	5–7

Source: <https://satsuite.collegeboard.org/sat/whats-on-the-test>

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SAT Scores

How Scores Are Calculated?

Total Score

Your total score is a number between 400 and 1600.

The total score is the sum of your scores on the Reading and Writing section and the Math section.

Each of these two section scores is in the range of 200–800.

Both sections contribute equally to the total score.

How the Section Scores Are Calculated

Your section scores are based on your performance on all test questions in the section. If you're routed to the higher-difficulty second module, you don't need to answer every question correctly to get a good score; conversely, if you're routed to the lower-difficulty second module, you'll have a full opportunity to answer questions in the module correctly and show what you know and can do.

Section scores range from 200 to 800, in 10-point intervals. Your scores on the Reading and Writing and Math sections added together will give you your total score for the SAT, which is on a 400–1600 scale, also in 10-point intervals.

What Is a Good SAT Score?

A good SAT score is one that helps you get admitted to a college that you want to go to.

The average SAT score is around 1050. Any score above that would be above average. A score of 1350 would put you in the top 10% of test takers and help make your application competitive at more selective schools.

In choosing colleges to apply to, consider factors such as the cost of tuition and availability of financial aid, location, and campus atmosphere. Also consider whether the college offers academic and extracurricular programs that interest you. To set your target SAT score, first explore a range of colleges that can offer you the mix of things you want. Then, look at the average SAT score for an admitted first-year student and use that as your target. The College Board college planning website BigFuture contains all of this information and is an excellent resource for researching colleges.

Note: Bear in mind that your SAT score is only one factor among several on your application. Your grades, application essay, and extracurriculars also shape admissions officers' perceptions of your application.

Source: <https://satsuite.collegeboard.org/sat/scores/understanding-scores>

ACT Test

Test	Total No. of Questions	Time	Test Descriptions
English	75	45 mins	Your ability to make decisions to revise and edit short texts and essays in different genres.
Math	60	60 mins	The mathematical skills you have typically acquired in courses up to the beginning of grade 12.
Reading	40	35 mins	Your ability to read closely, reason logically about texts using evidence, and integrate information from multiple resources.
Science	40	35 mins	The interpretation, analysis, evaluation, reasoning and problem-solving skills required in biology, chemistry, Earth/space sciences and physics.
Writing	1 prompt	40 mins	The optional writing section measures writing skills taught in high school English classes and in entry-level college composition courses.

ACT Scores

How are ACT scores calculated?

You've answered the questions and we've scored the results. Here's how:

First we counted the number of questions on each test that you answered correctly. We did not deduct any points for incorrect answers. (There is no penalty for guessing.)

Then we converted your raw scores (number of correct answers on each test) to "scale scores." Scale scores have the same meaning for all the different forms of the ACT® test, no matter which date a test was taken.

Your Composite score and each test score (English, mathematics, reading, science) range from 1 (low) to 36 (high). The Composite score is the average of your four test scores, rounded to the nearest whole number. Fractions less than one-half are rounded down; fractions one-half or more are rounded up.

Each reporting category includes the total number of questions in that category, the total number of questions in that category you answered correctly, and the percentage of questions correct. ACT

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reporting categories are aligned with ACT College and Career Readiness Standards and other standards that target college and career readiness.

Test	Number of Questions	Reporting Categories
English	75	Production of Writing (29-32%) Knowledge of Language (15-17%) Conventions of Standard English (52-55%)
Mathematics	60	Preparing for higher math (57-60%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number & Quantity (7-10%) • Algebra (12-15%) • Functions (12-15%) • Geometry (12-15%) • Statistics & Probability (8-12%) Integrating essential skills (40-43%) Modeling
Reading	40	Key ideas and details (52-60%) Craft and structure (25-30%) Integration of knowledge and ideas (13-23%)
Science	40	Interpretation of data (40-50%) Scientific investigation (20-30%) Evaluation of Models, inferences, and experimental results (25-35%)

What Is a Good ACT Score?

During your college application process having an ACT score can help you realize your dream of going to college. It is important to keep in mind that a "good" ACT score can vary greatly from person to person depending on their individual goals and college preferences. But scoring at or above the average ACT score for the college you are applying to gives you a good chance of being accepted.

The standard for what is considered a "good" ACT score will differ based on the selectivity and academic rigor of the colleges you have in mind. Are you aiming for admission into highly competitive Ivy League schools, or are you considering smaller, more specialized institutions? Different colleges have varying average ACT score ranges. While some universities may look for students with scores in the 30s, others may consider scores in the mid-20s as competitive. For example, the average ACT score for admitted students at Harvard University is 34 compared to the average ACT score of 23 for admitted students at University of Massachusetts Boston.

To get a clear understanding of what score you should aim for, research the average ACT scores of the schools you're interested in. College websites and admissions resources will often provide this information, allowing you to gauge where you stand and set a realistic target.

Source: <https://www.act.org/content/act/en-texas.html>

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The Do's and Don'ts for College Applications

DO'S	DON'TS
Start early and prepare your resume	Don't participate in too many extracurricular activities at the last minute just to crowd them in your resume – join your activities and community services that focus on your interest since grade 9
Keep a calendar with important dates	Don't forget to keep track of all admissions requirements
Practice and take college admission tests early	Don't forget to practice your test (and get free tests available at the College Board and ACT websites)
Ask for external advice on your essay writing and preparation	Don't wait until the last minutes to seek counselor's or teacher's recommendation letters – prepare a summary of your achievements for them
Consider and apply to more than one university	Don't forget to proofread all your admissions materials
Participate in community services to show your leadership	Don't forget to volunteer your time to help others
Visit colleges before making a final decision	Don't forget to have fun during your high school years

Preparing for College: Time Line

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Update at: http://www.uh.edu/socialwork/New_research/cwep/prospective-students/

	Freshman (Grade 9)	Sophomore (Grade 10)	Junior (Grade 11)	Senior (Grade 12)
September	Talk with your guidance counselors Sign up for courses that will prepare you for college Take honors or advanced classes in your interest areas	Begin to attend college fairs Consult with current students & alumni about their experiences	Continue to visit prospective schools & attend college fairs	Ask your references to write letters (3 weeks in advance) Begin your applications, making note of all deadlines & requirements Take the ACT (if desired)
October	Research prospective colleges	Take the PSAT	Look for opportunities to assume leadership positions in your extracurricular activities	Retake the ACT, SAT or SAT Subject tests (if desired)
November	Get involved in community & extracurricular activities that interest you	Continue to participate in extracurricular activities	Develop a short list of your target schools Begin researching scholarships**	Retake the SAT and SAT Subject tests (if desired)
December	Read more and practice writing skills	Make plans for campus visits (if desired)	Visit more college campuses over winter break	Retake the SAT and SAT Subject tests (if desired)
January	Talk with your parents about the cost of college & develop a financial plan		Take the SAT or SAT Subject Tests	Apply for financial aid as early as possible (either FAFSA or the TASFA)
February		Speak with your school counselor and develop an academic plan for your junior & senior years	Take the ACT	Discuss your final college selection with your parents and teachers
March		Make campus visits with your parents	Brainstorm ideas for essay topics (for admissions and scholarship applications)	Continue your scholarship applications
April		Attend college fairs to seek information about college majors	Take the SAT or ACT (if desired)	Pick a school and notify all accepted schools of your final decision
May			Write essays and seek editorial and guidance support	Write thank you notes to everyone who helped you with this process
June, July & August	Study for the PSAT	Study for the SAT or ACT	Start applying for scholarships Take the June SAT or ACT (if desired)	Look through the college's course listing & meet with a university academic counselor to select courses

**For scholarship information, please visit: http://www.uh.edu/socialwork/New_research/cwep/current-students/ (click at Scholarship Opportunities).

For more information about the MSW degree program in the Child Welfare Education Project, please email Dr. Monit Cheung at mcheung@uh.edu.